



CAMERA OBSCURA TURI PARK

18TH MARCH - 9TH APRIL 2005

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S U D T O

[Top] Nikau Poem at Noon MIXED MEDIA, 1,000 X 2,000MM, 2005

The work of light and memory

Turi Park's latest work seeks to represent and inhabit Aotearoa's specific qualities of light, as much as a New Zealand sense of landscape. Revisioning the (eco)tones of the bush – the browns, greens and glares of home – Park calls us into the layered memories of a place.

Imagine yourself in the bush, squinting. The scene before you is a haze of lightpoint as looking recedes and other senses are brought into play: sound, smell and touch bring the space to mind. Park disarms realism to draw the viewer into the image, via the senses. The techniques of *camera obscura* (Latin: dark chamber or room) becomes a means of knowing and unknowing. Park's chamber is not dark but dappled, edges of light softened by leaf form and loam. He attends to the conception of light and its subsequent diffusion through form and space. His intensive scrutiny of leaf form and the leaf-touched air, for example, is in part a homage to light.

The work of layering begins at the physical level: image, oils, bitumen and shellac evoke familiar rich tannins, kauri gum orange or translucent greens. Shellac and bitumen darken and refer pointedly to the Claude glass, skies are browned at the edges. Dark tones or dark spaces recall New Zealand's legacy of bush-burning, a powerful prosperity built on rivers of ash. These brooding qualities are often balanced by the glare of late spring in the corner of a frame. In *The Church that Jack Built* a green band, suggestive of an incongruous patch of manicured bowling green perched amongst *supplejack*, is, on closer inspection a leaf detail. The placement highlights 'those pockets of bush that exist' today, Park says, 'only because they were too difficult to control.'

Where might this eye for lush remnant come from? In his acclaimed book *Nga Uruora: the Groves of Life. History and Ecology in a New Zealand Landscape*, Geoff Park writes 'Reading the landscape – like using a tiny net in a big river – you can catch only some of the infinite detail'. Father and son have learnt in the bush and share a love of place, histories and detail. They see cycles of growth and change at multiple levels. The *Edge Light* sequence takes a wide-angled view of the kahikatea near Peter MacIntyre's house at Kakahi. *Decimal Currency* refers to the way farm stock have consumed the undergrowth, foreclosing on the cycle of regeneration promised in the third image, while in the diffused central panel the river becomes a ribbon of light, opening us to distance.



Edge Light_Study #4 MIXED MEDIA, 450 X 900MM, 2005

Any (post) colonial landscape is layered with disruption and diffusion. The Conservation of Linear Momentum maps the earth tones of the kiekie leaf onto the land. The leaf references the ploughed furrows of Parihaka; the focus on leaf form acknowledges the intricacies of kowhaiwhai and whakapapa. Dawn Poem for Taranaki views Tongariro and Ruapehu from Taranaki. Here, Park's vantage point is the porch of a hut moved onto Taranaki by the early Chief Surveyor S. Percy Smith. (Smith procured many scenic reserves, an appropriation that preserved the stands from the work of the plough and the work of the snare). Park's work is quietly suggestive of the histories tucked away in these (now) un-lived in spaces.

Detail is pressed, reworked and released, balanced within cycles of growth and what Park has called a 'currency of decay'. These visual layers are alive to the way memory and process can be caught in the net of the senses, glimpsing what has slipped beyond the present. Revisioning and remembering, Turi Park draws us closer still to where we are, helping us to see where we might yet be.

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Dawn Poem for Taranaki
MIXED MEDIA
1,000 X 2,000MM, 2005



Knowledge Economy MIXED MEDIA, 1,000 X 2,000MM, 2005



The Conservation of Linear Momentum
MIXED MEDIA,
1,000 X 2,000MM, 2005



Decimal Currency
MIXED MEDIA
1,000 X 2,000MM, 2005



The Church that Jack Built MIXED MEDIA, 1,000 X 2,000MM, 2005



The Church of St. Jack_Study #3 MIXED MEDIA, 600 X 1,800MM, 2005



The Forces of Action and Reaction are Equal and Opposite MIXED MEDIA, 1,000 X 2,000MM, 2005



Edge Light_Study #5 MIXED MEDIA, 450 X 900MM, 2005



Rhopalostylis_Study #5 MIXED MEDIA, 600 X 1,800MM, 2005



Edge Light_Kahabi. MIXED MEDIA, 600 X 2,000MM, 2005

Going Bush

"This was real bush he was going into now, not the mountain-bush of birch-trees that he had seen on Ruapehu, but deep, thick, and matted, great trees going up to the sky, and beneath them a tangle of ferns and bush-lawyer and undergrowth, the ground heavy with layers of rotting leaves and mould. To go forward at all was difficult, held back all the time by twining undergrowth. The air was dark, lifeless; it was rich with the sweet, rotting smell of the bush, and only stray glimpses of light came through the trees above."

John Mulgan, *Man Alone*

When we 'see' a landscape we situate ourselves in it; we situate ourselves in history. Turi Park's *Camera Obscura* series goes bush seriously, not to "get away from it all", but to situate us; presenting us with an archaeology of light. His tool is not the spade, but the lens of the camera obscura – *the dark room*.

Light into darkness is a seed of storytelling, from tales told around the campfire, god-light in a church, the projected beam of cinema, to the architecture of the marae:

"As I followed you, it seemed as if I was entering another world. There was no other light except that which streamed through the open door.

I gasped, e pa, at the sight of the house. I was filled with wonder. The panels were like tall trees, elaborately decorated, extending along both walls like a pathway into a forest. Some of the panels were painted with Maori designs and some with sinuous twining plants, like vines curling upwards to the roof. Fantastic birds flew through the timeless forest and fruits and flowers seemed to open crimson petals to the light. People climbed among the branches and glittering creatures of another world soared to the rafters."

Witi Ihimaera, *Tangi*

Illumination is the beginning of the story. Caravaggio's subjects appear to inhabit very dark rooms or cavernous voids, lit only by a single, strong light source. Cinematographer Gordon Willis's light on Brando's face in *The Godfather* barely draws his face out of the darkness, but makes the man. Closer to home McCahon looked at the diffusion of a single light over, not a dark room, but a dark land, recasting Aotearoa as a land of the long black shadow.

Park uses the camera obscura literally (photographs form the basis of the images) and as focal concept. In *The Forces of Action and Reaction are Equal and Opposite* the wide openings of light make the bush appear picturesque, formally pleasing, 'forest-like'. This is where undergrowth would be if it hadn't been slashed, burnt and grazed for farming. This dissipation is contrasted with *The Church That Jack Built* where the dense Supplejack vines coalesce to invoke a church's stained glass window. The pattern references Kowhaiwhai; designs accepted on New Zealand's coins as part of our *Decimal Currency*, but exchanged with scant knowledge of the abstraction's rangitiratanga relationship with their origin. In the slyly named *Knowledge Economy* Park's cost-benefit analysis is an alternative bank note that asks: what do we know and at what expense the exchange? In *Dawn Poem for Taranaki*, and *The Conservation of Linear Momentum*, projected apparitions or scenes bush-bash through each other in strata of light, space and time, as if in a porous slide lecture.

Park perceives a way of seeing (cheers John Berger) that provokes new consideration of the landscape. Picture the ubiquitous mono-tone green of the NZ farm vista: bucolic sheep grazing, an East Coast hill branded by slips, the blue stretch of the Pacific sky, perhaps the odd staunch ti kouka and pine to frame, Mt Taranaki for perspective ... Next, with time-lapse strokes fill in spaghetti spirals of supplejack, green swathes of karaka, ponga and tawa, immense totara trunks lashed with vines, orchids. An intractable dark room replaces the green and pleasant land. Now pierce the canopy with what Ian Wedde names the "westerling light". This 'edge light' (as Park frames it) is both compelling and threatening.

In Park's reckoning the play of shadows in the bush draws out both the imperatives and the profligacy of settlement. Park does not judge, but excavates, and posits the perspective as (en)lightening. He gains the insight not through the European bird's eye view, set high above the landscape, but through a native bird's eye view. When looking through the undergrowth – at the geometries of Nikau fronds, the impressionist photo-blur of *Edge Light*, supplejack tied by Pollock – it's clear that there is something else about Park's tenebrism. It is designed from the interior: the heart of New Zealand's darkness.

Park conceives the interior in the land of the great outdoors as awe-worthy as Mitre Peak postcard fare. Park's is a stained sublime, confronting 'the original' and the mundane march of our affect on it. History is not naively negated: the bitumen staining the canvas is as evocative of Mulgan's fecund mulch as it is of the tar-sealed roads that are the veins of Aotearoa's occupation. It is a celebration of chaos, fertility, memory, and isn't afraid to find beauty in the bruise (the noxious yet striking Arum Lily in *The Forces of Action and Reaction are Equal and Opposite*). The natural is not simplistically set as 100% pure virgin before the fall, against the rape of man (with viewer piously positioned as apologist). Instead, Park's images stand us firmly in the whenua and asks the spectator to look again, from the inside. To go bush.

The *Camera Obscura* series recognises that when we are prevented from seeing, we are deprived of history. Park digs into the light and works through the dust and diffusion. His lens asks us to consider the southern sun – the beams of Ra – as something far more than just for basking in. Going bush, before bush is going, going ... gone.

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Edge Light_Study #8 MIXED MEDIA, 450 X 900MM, 2005

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